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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001578

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: TSVANGIRAI EMERGING ON TOP IN MATABELELAND

REF: A. REF A: HARARE 001560

[B.](#) REF B: HARARE 001537

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1
.4 b/d

Summary

[¶1.](#) (C) Tsvangirai's successful November 13 rally in Bulawayo - and the "pro-Senate" faction's poor showings in contrast - confirmed the ascendancy of the Tsvangirai faction in Matabeleland, according to MDC and

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civil society figures in Bulawayo. A former moderator in the MDC dispute, MDC MP for Bulawayo Thokozani Khupe, reported that talks were dead and that both sides were now waiting for election day. Most Tsvangirai supporters expect the de facto separation will lead to conclusive divorce by next year's scheduled Party Congress, leaving the party stronger and better equipped to confront the regime. End Summary.

Dueling Rallies Leave Tsvangirai on Top

[¶2.](#) (C) Khupe told poloff on November 15 that several thousand supporters attended Tsvangirai's rally in Bulawayo two days earlier, demonstrating his popularity in the supposed heartland of pro-participation sentiment. (N.B. AFP estimated the crowd at 8,000-10,000 people.) In a separate meeting on November 16, MDC National Executive Council member for Bulawayo Getrude Mtombeni told poloff, that unusual for preelection rallies, many of the attendees were older people, adding their socially significant voices to the anti-Senate cry.

[¶3.](#) (C) In addition to the Sunday rally, Khupe said Tsvangirai had walked through many parts of Bulawayo where he

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was well-received by residents who have never seen local politicians Ncube and Sibanda walking amongst them. Suggesting that Tsvangirai's popularity also stretches to rural Matabeleland, a civil society leader in Lupane told poloff on November 16 that impromptu roadside stops by the MDC president attracted scores of well wishers.

[¶4.](#) (C) In contrast, Khupe (probably the most prominent Ndebele MP in Tsvangirai's camp) and Mtombeni reported that rallies held by participation faction leaders Ncube and Sibanda were being attending by only handfuls of people. Khupe added that Sibanda was heckled at one rally in Bulawayo and forced to cut his speech short. Ncube and Sibanda were so embarrassed by the low turnout, according to Khupe, that they were no longer campaigning. Instead, they had begun to send only second string, pro-Senate MPs from Matabeleland, such as Abednico Bhebe and Milton Gwetu, to rallies.

[¶5.](#) (C) Khupe said the popularity of Tsvangirai's boycott call and poor turnout at pro-participation rallies had prompted many would-be Senators to reconsider their candidacy, but that the pro-Senate leadership was pressing them to remain in the race. In addition, some MDC MPs, such as Binga, Joel Gabuza, had directly pressured Senate candidates in their districts to withdraw, according to Khupe, fearing that a failed candidacy would undermine their own support. Mtombeni added that the MDC candidates might have to withdraw by default, since they might not be able to find enough supporters to act as polling agents.

Toward a Leaner, Meaner MDC?

[¶6.](#) (C) Khupe reported that efforts to mediate the crisis failed when Ncube, Gift Chimanikire, and Fletcher Dulini Ncube refused to meet with her and three other MDC notables deployed by the National Council to moderate the crisis (ref B). Instead, both sides were now waiting for the results of the Senate election. Khupe anticipated that none of the MDC

Senatorial candidates would win in Matabeleland, solidifying Tsvangirai's standing within the party. Even

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pro-participation MP Bhebhe conceded to poloff on November 14 that none of the candidates in Bulawayo were likely to win and that support in the rural areas was thin. Civil society leaders attending a November 15 and 16 conference hosted by NGO Bulawayo Agenda agreed that boycott calls and voter apathy would result in a low turnout among the Ndebele, although some predicted as many seven of Matabeleland's 15 opposition candidates could still win.

17. (C) A poor showing on election day would likely prompt Ncube to resign and seal Sibanda's fate ahead of the party Congress, according to Khupe. The shedding of his detractors would give Tsvangirai undisputed control of the party and a freer hand in adopting a more confrontational strategy toward the Mugabe regime. According to Khupe, the success of recent protests by the National Constitutional Assembly and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ref A) had demonstrated the people's desire to confront the regime. Echoing others in the ascendant camp, Khupe emphasized that the MDC would now be more attuned to the grassroots and more eager to confront the government; she proclaimed &the enthusiasm of 1999 has returned.⁸

Comment

18. (C) Despite the presence of many prominent Ndebele in the pro-Senate camp, grassroots support for participation in Matabeleland appears to be lacking. Accordingly, the argument advanced by the Ncube faction has changed from one of participation in the name of defending MDC strongholds, to one of attacking Tsvangirai for violations of the party constitution, a technical argument that appears not to resonate with the party's base and of which they are themselves likely guilty. Unfortunately, this tactical change coincides with increasingly personal attacks by leadership on both sides, but especially by the Ncube faction, which makes a &divorce8 all but inevitable and likely messy. In that regard, we have already seen rising intra-party violence, such as a brawl the night before Tsvangirai's Bulawayo rally that resulted in one pro-boycott

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youth losing his eye. Tsvangirai supporters have reiterated to emboffs that the door was open for a return of the pro-Senate figures, albeit in diminished status, but none were expected to return, suggesting to us that Ncube and company will be relegated to the political sidelines.

SCHULTZ